

Wildfire Investigation

The ACT Rural Fire Service Chief Officer has issued this standard operating procedure under Section 38(1) of the *Emergencies Act 2004* – A Chief Officer may determine standards and protocols.

Purpose

This standard operating procedure (SOP) maps the decision process for activating, conducting and reporting the investigation of a wildfire in the ACT for the ACT Rural Fire Service (ACTRFS).

Applicability

This SOP provides guidance to the ACTRFS Duty officer (DO) and Incident Controllers (IC) to help identify which fires require formal investigation and the process for activating, conducting and reporting on investigations for ACTRFS members who are trained and certified as wildfire investigators. This SOP is applicable to all wildfires within the ACT.

Background.

Under Section 112 of the *Emergencies Act 2004, Investigation of Fires*, the ACT Emergency Services Agency (ESA) has a responsibility to determine the cause of fires it attends in the ACT and surrounding areas.

This SOP also enacts the Memorandum of Understanding between the Australian Federal Police (AFP), the ACT Coroner's Office, ACT Fire and Rescue (ACTF&R) and ACTRFS on the service concerning the investigation of fires in the ACT.

Responsibilities

| | |
|------------------------------|--|
| IC | Request ComCen to notify RFS DO to request investigation and notify the AFP. Report fire to ComCen and RFS DO that it meets the requirements of when an investigation must take place. Secure the area and take incident notes |
| ACTRFS DO | Notify Investigator and AFP. Update event log if no investigation is required or possible. |
| ACTRFS Wildfire Investigator | Investigate the wildfire. Report to the RFS Director, Operations and AFP (if applicable) |
| ACTRFS Director, Operations | Ensure report is filed. Forward report to ACT Coroner's Office (if applicable). |

Operating procedure

When must an investigation take place

If the fire involves **any** of the following components, a formal investigation **must** be undertaken.

- significant damage to property, including agricultural assets such as fencing, fodder, fuel, etc.
- serious injury or death to any person
- suspicious / deliberate activity (especially where it is deemed to be one of a series of deliberately-lit fires in the areas)
- significant public interest
- other circumstances as directed by the RFS Chief Officer or ESA Commissioner.

Activation process

1. The Incident Controller notifies the RFS DO (through ComCen or direct phone call) to:
 - request an investigation
 - notify the AFP.
2. RFS DO notifies a fire investigator, providing details of the fire location and associated circumstances.
3. The Investigator liaises with the AFP and ACTF&R Duty Operations Superintendent for the response of the Fire Investigation Unit (FIU) to coordinate their attendance for fires within the built-up area.

Note: The examination of the fire scene should occur as soon as is practicable.

Once an investigation has been activated

The examination of the fire scene should occur as soon as is practicable.

The ACTRFS Wildfire Investigator should follow the instructions in the *ACTRFS Fire Investigation Guidelines* and record findings using the official form, *Wildfire Investigation Field Notes Report*. This form should be obtained from members of the ACTRFS Operations Section.

The ACTRFS Investigator:

1. attends the scene and completes a *Wildfire Investigation Field Notes Report*
2. engages ESA Spatial Services if required
3. retains the original report
4. provides electronic copy of report (including images) to the ACTRFS Director, Operations who will forward to AFP Investigating Officer (if applicable).

The ACTRFS Director, Operations:

1. enters reporting information in the Fire Investigation database
2. retains an electronic copy
3. supplies copy of report to ACT Coroner's Office (if AFP have not attended).

All other fires


If no formal investigation is required, the IC for the fire must report the suspected cause to the ComCen for supply to the ACTRFS DO. The RFS DO must record this in their event report.

Document information

Version history

| Author | Version | Version Approval Date | Summary of Changes |
|--------------|---------|-----------------------|---|
| Joe Murphy | 1.0 | 22/12/2016 | Version 1.0 |
| Rohan Scott | 2.0 | 15/07/2020 | Reformatted, references, forms updated. |
| Rod Anderson | 3.0 | 10/06/2021 | Administrative Review |

Approved by

| Name | Title/Role | Signature | Date |
|-------------|------------|--|----------|
| Rohan Scott | CO ACTRFS |  | 23-07-21 |

Document Owner

| Position | Section |
|----------|------------|
| Director | Operations |

Next review due: 23/07/2022

Related documents

| Document name |
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| Emergencies Act 2004 |
| ACTRFS Fire Investigation Guidelines |
| Memorandum of Understanding between AFP, Coroner's Court of the ACT, ACTF&R and ACTRFS on service concerning the investigation of fires in the ACT |

Signed documents will be scanned and filed in TRIM.

